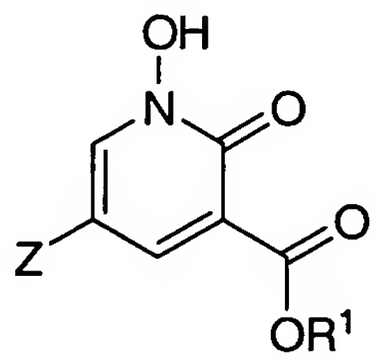
IN THE CLAIMS

The listing of the claims which follows replaces any and all prior versions and/or listings of the claims in the application.

1. (original) A compound of formula (I), or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof:



(I)

wherein

Z represents C_{2-6} alkynyl, aryl or heteroaryl, any of which groups may be optionally substituted; and

R^1 represents hydrogen, C_{1-6} alkyl, C_{3-7} heterocycloalkyl(C_{1-6})alkyl, di(C_{1-6})alkylamino(C_{1-6})alkyl, C_{2-6} alkylcarbonyloxy(C_{1-6})alkyl or C_{3-7} cycloalkoxycarbonyloxy(C_{1-6})alkyl.

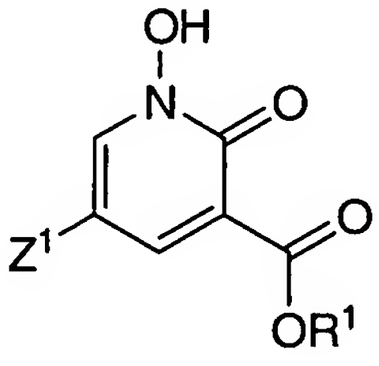
2. (original) A compound as claimed in Claim 1 wherein Z represents optionally substituted C_{2-6} alkynyl.

3. (original) A compound as claimed in Claim 1 wherein Z represents an optionally substituted aryl or heteroaryl moiety.

4. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in Claim 1 ~~any one of Claims 1 to 3~~ wherein

R^1 is hydrogen, methyl, ethyl, morpholinylethyl, dimethylaminoethyl, acetoxymethyl, pivaloyloxymethyl or 1-(cyclohexyloxycarbonyloxy)ethyl.

5. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in Claim 1 of formula (III):



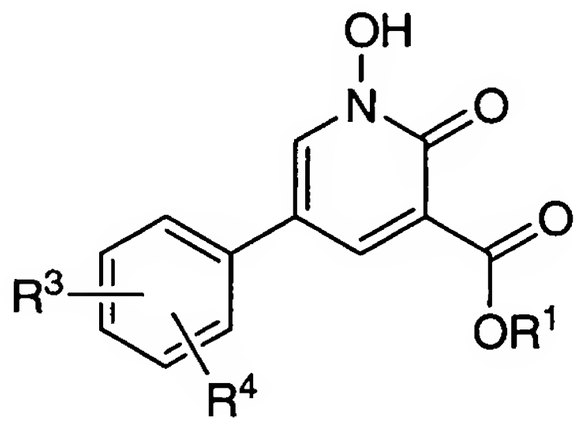
(III)

wherein

Z^1 represents optionally substituted aryl. ~~aryl; and~~

~~R^1 is as defined in Claim 1.~~

6. (currently amended) A compound according to claim 5 of formula (IV):



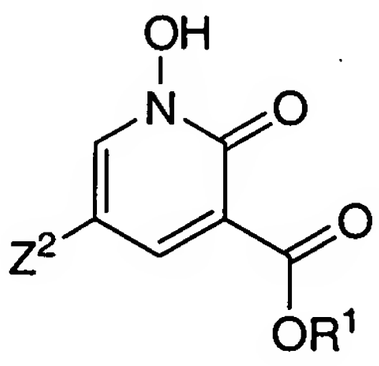
(IV)

wherein

~~R^1 is as defined in Claim 5; and~~

each of R^3 and R^4 is ~~may~~ independently ~~be selected from~~ H or a substituent group.

7. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in Claim 1 of formula (X):



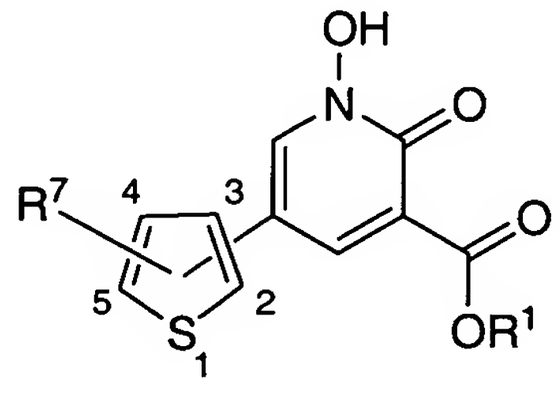
(X)

wherein

Z^2 represents optionally substituted heteroaryl. ~~heteroaryl; and~~

~~R^1 is as defined in Claim 1.~~

8. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in Claim 7 of formula (XI) below:



(XI)

wherein

~~R^1 is as defined in Claim 7; and~~

R^7 is selected from halogen, hydroxy, $-NO_2$, $-NH_2$, formyl, C_{2-6} alkylcarbonyl, $-CO_2H$, C_{2-6} alkoxycarbonyl, C_{1-6} alkyl, C_{1-6} alkenyl, C_{2-6} alkynyl, -CN, C_{1-6} alkoxy, C_{1-6} alkylthio, C_{1-6} alkylsulfinyl, C_{1-6} alkylsulfonyl or a group of the formula (II):

$$-X-R^2 \qquad (II)$$

where X is a linkage group and R^2 is a ~~relatively~~ hydrophobic group.

9. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in Claim 1, which is: ~~selected from:~~

1-hydroxy-2-oxo-5-phenyl-1,2-dihydropyridine-3-carboxylic acid,
1-hydroxy-5-{3-[({[1-(1-naphthyl)ethyl]amino}carbonyl)amino]phenyl}-2-oxo-1,2-dihydropyridine-3-carboxylic acid,
5-(3-{[(5-bromothien-2-yl)carbonyl]amino}phenyl)-1-hydroxy-2-oxo-1,2-dihydropyridine-3-carboxylic acid,
5-[2-({[(2-chlorobenzyl)amino]carbonyl}amino)phenyl]-1-hydroxy-2-oxo-1,2-dihydropyridine-3-carboxylic acid,
1-hydroxy-5-(2-nitrophenyl)-2-oxo-1,2-dihydropyridine-3-carboxylic acid;
or a tautomer thereof, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

10.-11. (canceled).

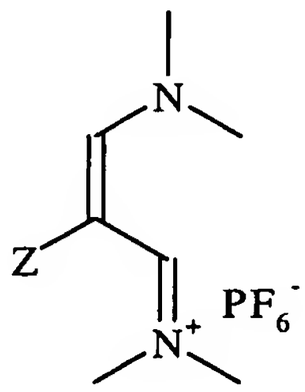
12. (currently amended) A pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound as claimed in Claim 1, ~~any one of Claims 1 to 9,~~ or a tautomer thereof, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, in association with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

13. (currently amended) The pharmaceutical composition as claimed in Claim 12 which further comprises one or more other agents for the treatment of viral infections ~~such as an antiviral agent, or an immunomodulatory agent such as α-, β- or γ-interferon~~.

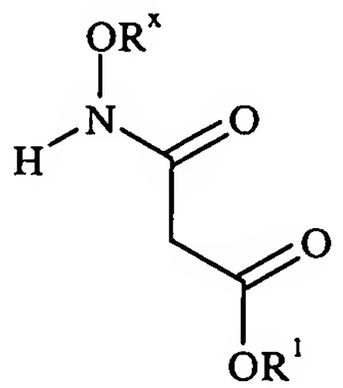
14. (currently amended) A method of inhibiting hepatitis C virus polymerase and/or of treating or preventing an illness due to hepatitis C virus, the method involving administering to a human or animal (preferably mammalian) subject suffering from the condition a therapeutically or prophylactically effective amount of ~~the pharmaceutical composition claimed in Claim 12 or Claim 13 or of~~ a compound as claimed in Claim 1, ~~any one of Claims 1 to 9,~~ or a tautomer thereof, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

15. (currently amended) A method of preparation of a pharmaceutical composition, involving admixing at least one compound as claimed in Claim 1, ~~any one of Claims 1 to 9,~~ or a tautomer thereof, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, with one or more pharmaceutically acceptable adjuvants, diluents or carriers ~~and/or with one or more other therapeutically or prophylactically active agents~~.

16. (currently amended) A process to prepare a compound as claimed in Claim 1 ~~any one of Claims 1 to 9~~ which comprises reacting a compound of formula (XIV) with a compound of formula (XV):



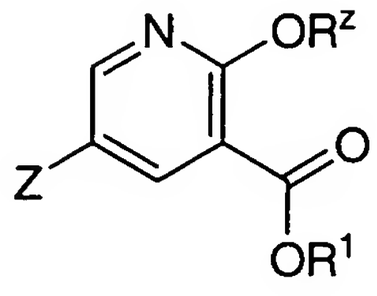
(XIV)



(XV)

wherein ~~Z and R1 are as defined in Claim 1, and~~ R^x represents a hydroxy-protecting group; followed by removal of the hydroxy-protecting group R^x.

17. (currently amended) A process to prepare a compound as claimed in Claim 1 ~~any one of Claims 1 to 9~~ which comprises oxidizing a compound of formula (XVII):



(XVII)

wherein ~~Z and R^1 are as defined in Claim 1, and~~ R^z represents C_{1-6} alkyl; followed by cleavage of the R^z moiety.